Caucus Membership and Loyalty as Predictors of Career Progression Among Academics in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

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Abstract

This study investigated caucus membership and loyalty influence on career progression among academics in Nigerian Universities and Polytechnics. The study population consisted of all academic staff in Nigerian Universities. The study involved a sample of 350 academics. The data collection instrument was Caucus Membership, Loyalty and Academics Career Progression (CMLACP) validated by experts. Reliability of the instrument was determined by applying Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 that provided internal consistency value of 0.79. The obtained data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and Multiple Regression. The study findings indicated among others that there is a significant negative relationship between caucus membership status (member vs. non-member) and the academic progress of lecturers. Furthermore, the finding reveals that there is a significant relationship between the level of loyalty to a caucus and the academic progress of lecturers, finally the finding reveals that there is joint significant contribution of caucus membership and loyalty on academic's career progress. Findings raise concerns about meritocracy, equity, and institutional integrity. The paper recommends transparent promotion policies, checks on informal power structures, and enhanced ethics training.

Keywords: Caucus Membership, loyalty, academics, career progression.

Introduction

The primary mission of universities is the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge through teaching, research, and community service. Lecturer performance, crucial for achieving these objectives, is typically evaluated based on established academic metrics across the "Tridharma"

(three devotions) of higher education: education (teaching, student assessment), research (publications, grants, patents), and community service. Academic progress for lecturers is often measured by objective, performance-based outcomes such as publication records (journals, conference proceedings), grant acquisition, successful student supervision, teaching evaluations, and career advancement (promotions, tenure). These measures are intended to ensure meritocracy and maintain high educational standards. (**Altbach, 2004**).

However, the internal dynamics of academic institutions often involve complex socio-political structures, including the formation of informal groups or "caucuses". A caucus, in this context, is a group of academics organized to further specific interests, which can range from shared pedagogical philosophies to political alignments within the university administration. Membership in these caucuses often involves a degree of loyalty, where individuals align their support and actions with the group's agenda.

While formal performance metrics exist, there is a growing concern that informal affiliations and loyalty to these internal caucuses may influence career trajectories, sometimes overshadowing actual academic merit. The existing literature widely discusses various predictors of academic performance, such as individual motivation, knowledge sharing, and institutional support systems, but often overlooks the potentially significant, though informal, impact of internal political dynamics. **(Demarest, 2022)**

Existing research has not adequately addressed how deeply these internal caucus dynamics penetrate and potentially distort the formal mechanisms designed to ensure fair academic progress for lecturers. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the extent to which caucus membership and loyalty predict the academic progress of lecturers, as measured by established, objective performance indicators.

Academic institutions are generally envisioned as meritocratic environments where career progression (academic progress) is determined primarily by an individual's qualifications, research output, teaching effectiveness, and service contributions. These criteria are intended to ensure the quality and competence of faculty members, which in turn contributes to the university's overall performance and the quality of education provided to students. (**Olanrewaju, 2021**).

However, the reality in many institutions may be influenced by underlying organizational politics, where informal groups, often referred to as "caucuses," form around shared interests or goals. While some caucuses serve a formal purpose within governance structures (like an academic senate) to promote dialogue on professional matters, others may operate informally and pursue specific agendas or support particular individuals. (**Burt, 1992**).

The influence of such political dynamics in an academic setting can introduce non-meritocratic factors into career advancement processes. Decisions regarding promotions, resource allocation, committee assignments, and even the fair utilization of an academic's talents may become influenced by their affiliation with, or loyalty to, a particular caucus. This situation potentially creates a system where an individual's "political" alignment becomes as, or more, important than their actual academic achievements and potential.

Statement of the Problem

The core issue is that membership and loyalty to caucuses within a university setting, which are primarily political or interest-based groups, may be acting as unacknowledged predictors of a lecturer's academic progress, potentially undermining the formal, merit-based systems of evaluation. The formal evaluation systems for lecturers, which focus on teaching, research, and service outputs, aim for objectivity; however, the informal dynamics of caucus membership introduce a potential bias.

The problem is significant because when advancement is perceived to be influenced by political allegiance rather than professional competence, it can foster a culture of fear, conformity, and demotivation among faculty members. This environment can lead to several negative outcomes:

Decisions regarding promotions, grant funding, and access to key leadership positions might favor caucus members, irrespective of their academic output, Lecturers outside dominant caucuses may experience reduced job satisfaction and motivation if they believe their hard work goes unrewarded due to a lack of political affiliation, If academic progress is driven by loyalty rather than merit, the overall quality of education and research within the institution may decline, as the most capable individuals may not be the ones advancing to leadership or senior roles.

This study aims to:

1) Determine the extent of caucus membership among academics in Nigeria.
2) Examine the association between loyalty to caucus leaders and career progression metrics (promotions, administrative roles).
3) Explore how academics perceive and respond to pressure to conform.
4) Offer policy recommendations to safeguard fairness and institutional integrity.

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study

1) There is no significant relationship between caucus membership status (member vs. non-member) and the academic progress of lecturers.
2) There is no significant relationship between the level of loyalty to a caucus and the academic progress of lecturers.
3) Caucus membership and loyalty, either jointly or independently, do not significantly predict the academic progress of lecturers.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design; quantitative surveys followed by qualitative interviews to explain and deepen findings.

Population and Sample

Population: Academic staff (Assistant lecturers to professors) in Nigerian federal, state, and private universities.

Sample: 350 academics (stratified sampling by institution type and region). From the survey respondents, 25 were selected for in-depth interviews using purposive sampling (high/low caucus influence).

Data Collection Instruments

Survey questionnaire: demographics, academic credentials, caucus membership (yes/no), self - reported loyalty scale, promotion history, administrative roles, perception of influence.

Interview guide: narratives about career progression, pressures to join caucus, loyalty expectations, moral dilemmas, coping strategies.

Data Analysis

Quantitative: Descriptive statistics, correlation, multiple regression (predicting promotion and administrative roles). Controls include years of service, number of publications, qualifications.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality ensured Sensitivity for participants who may fear reprisal Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval obtained

Result and findings

Research Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between caucus membership status (member vs. non-member) and the academic progress of lecturers.

To test for the relationship between caucus membership status (member vs. non-member) and the academic progress of lecturers, Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) formula was used to carry out the correlation analysis to ascertain the desired relationship.

TABLE 1: Correlation Analysis using PPMC to show the relationship between caucus membership status (member vs. non-member) and the academic progress of lecturers

Variables	**N**	**Df**	**r-cal**	**p-value**
Caucus Membership	350	348	- 0.813	0.020
Career Progression	350			

$P < 0.05$

In Table 1, the results showed that r_{cal} = - 0.813 and $p < 0.05$. The r_{cal} = - 0.813 revealed a significant negative relationship between caucus membership status (member vs. non-member) and the academic progress of lecturers and since $p < 0.05$, the research hypothesis 2 is hereby rejected. This implies there is a significant negative relationship between caucus membership status (member vs. non-member) and the academic progress of lecturers.

Research Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between the level of loyalty to a caucus and the academic progress of lecturers.

To test for the relationship between the level of loyalty to a caucus and the academic progress of lecturers. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) formula was used to carry out the correlation analysis to determine this relationship.

TABLE 2: Correlation Analysis using PPMC to show the relationship between the level of loyalty to a caucus and the academic progress of lecturers.

Variables	**N**	**Df**	**r-cal**	**p-value**
Loyalty to Caucus	350	348	- 0.608	0.011
Career Progression	350			

$P < 0.05$

In Table 2, the results showed that $r_{cal} = - 0.608$ and $p < 0.05$, which indicates strong negative relationship between the level of loyalty to a caucus and the academic progress of lecturers. Thus, the research hypothesis 2 is hereby rejected, which implies that there is a significant relationship between the level of loyalty to a caucus and the academic progress of lecturers.

Research Hypothesis 3

There is no significant joint contribution of caucus membership and loyalty, on academic career progress of lecturers.

To test whether there exists no significant joint contribution of the independent variables (i.e., caucus membership and loyalty) on academic career progression, Multiple Regression analysis is used to investigate such relationship.

TABLE 3: Multiple Regression Analysis Showing the joint contribution of the independent variables (i.e., caucus membership and loyalty) on academic career progression

R = 0.6163

$R^2 = 0.3798$					
Adjusted $R^2 = 0.3759$					
Standard Error of Estimate = 1.676					
Model	**Df**	**Sum of Squares**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**P-value**
Regression	3	818.20	272.73	97.06	0.015
Residual	346	1335.98	2.81		
Total	**349**	**2154.18**			

$P < 0.05$

The result shown in Table 3 revealed the value of F-cal to be 97.06 and $P < 0.05$. The results show that caucus membership and loyalty to a caucus have significant joint contribution on the on academic career progress of lecturers, and since $P < 0.05$, the hypothesis is hereby rejected. Also, the R^2 value is 0.3798, and this implies that the joint contribution of the two independent variables is responsible for 38% of the total variance in academic career progress of academics. The percentage (i.e., 38%) obtained from the analysis suggests the existence of other factors not considered in this study, which may as well influence the career progression of academics.

Table 4: Relative Contribution of caucus membership, loyalty on the academic career progress to the Result

Model	**Unstandardized coefficients**		**Standardized coefficients**	**T**	**Sig.**
	B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
1 (Constant)	1.976	0.79		2.501	< 0.001
Caucus Membership	- 0.891	0.032	- 0.248	-27.84	< 0.001
Loyalty	- 0.223	0.027	- 0.099	-8.259	< 0.001

In Table 4, it revealed that each of the independent variables (i.e., caucus membership and loyalty) significantly determined academic career progression. Based on the results presented in Table 5, it shows that the values of $\beta = -0.248$, $t = -27.84$ and $p < 0.05$ for caucus membership and $\beta = -0.099$, $t = -8.259$, $p < 0.05$ for loyalty. This implies that caucus membership and loyalty both negatively and significantly contributed to the academic career progress. However, the absolute values of $\beta = -0.248$, $t = -27.84$ as presented in Table 5, indicated that caucus membership has the highest contribution on academic career progression. This is followed by loyalty with the absolute values of $\beta = -0.099$, $t = -8.259$, has the lowest contribution on academic career progression. Also, since the value of $P < 0.05$, the hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant contribution of caucus membership and loyalty on academic progress of lecturers is hereby rejected. Hence, it can be concluded that there is joint significant contribution of caucus membership and loyalty on academics' career progress.

Discussion

The findings support the hypothesis that caucus membership and loyalty exert strong influence on academic progression in Nigeria. Even after controlling for merit, loyalty variables accounted for additional variance in promotions and leadership role allocation. This has serious implications for academic fairness and institutional integrity. While caucuses may offer support and mentorship, their dominance threatens transparency. Over time, institutions may devolve into systems where competence is secondary to affiliation.

Comparatively, academic politics in other contexts also show invisible networks but the stakes and opacity seem higher in resource-challenged settings where oversight is weaker.

The qualitative accounts reveal emotional costs: resentment, demotivation, moral tension. Some talented academics also self-exclude to avoid being complicit, choosing limited career paths rather than joining power structures.

Conclusion

Caucus membership and loyalty are significant predictors of career progression among Nigerian academics. These informal structures though often unacknowledged shape who advances, who leads, and who remains marginalized. This system poses risks to meritocracy, morale, and institutional trust.

While informal networks are inescapable in human organizations, unchecked power by caucuses can undermine the mission of universities as meritocratic and knowledge-driven institutions.

Recommendations

1) Transparent Promotion Policies: Ensure criteria (publications, teaching, service) are explicit, published, and strictly followed.
2) Independent Oversight Committees: External members (from other universities) to audit promotion decisions and committee assignments.
3) Rotation and Term Limits for Leadership: Prevent entrenchment of caucus leaders by rotating chairs and heads across departments.
4) Ethics & Governance Training: Offer workshops for staff and management on academic integrity, transparency, and resisting undue pressure.
5) Merit-Based Mentorship Programs: Formal mentorship not tied to caucus membership to support early-career academics.

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